

Gurmat: Naam - Simran - and Gurmantra

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Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa!
Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh!!

There seems to be a widespread confusion about Naam, Simran, and Gurmantra. We will discuss some important characteristics of all three together, because they are closely related. This article is bound to be long. To avoid distractions, there are no references for the quotes. As always, an attempt is made to write the entire contents according to Gurbani. Just read it and then verify it with Gurbani. Then, please point out my mistakes.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji has said, "Write Naam, write His praise, write that there is no end, and that there is no limit." This, kind of, sums up everything about Naam. There is so much wisdom already in all the articles on Naam so far, and so much more can be written still. I have decided to post it as an unfinished article. If I waited until I had all the important ideas incorporated here, it would not be posted for a long time. We would discover some new item everyday. I plan to just edit it later, and finally post it at other sites also.

Naam

It is a popular misunderstanding that 'Naam' in Gurbani means a name. However, this meaning cannot do justice to Naam. We could say that Naam means truth. As long as we regard Naam

as a name or a word, we will have trouble grasping the concept of Naam in Gurbani. Let us see why.

In the opening verse of Jaap Sahib Guru Ji says to God that you have so many names, no one can enumerate them. Later, Guru Ji says that you have no name. Therefore, it does not matter how we call God because He has no name and yet all these names are his. If God has no name, then the term 'Naam' could not have meant to represent a mere name. Why, then, did Guru Ji use the word 'Naam' for the central theme of Gurbani, the greatest gift from God?

A name reminds us of the qualities of someone or something who may not be here, or something that is in our memory from a past experience. God does not meet these definitions. God is not an object. Being not subject to space and time constraints, he is also always present. Since God pervades everything, He is never absent. Nor can God be conceived only as a memory because He is the basis of all our perceptions. Memory of God cannot be separated from God. Thus, unlike everything else, it is not possible to separate God from His "name". This is a unique function of Naam.

When we understand this, we see that Naam is the shortest link between man and God. Naam is God reaching out to man, or man reaching in for God. But since God had never left us, a distance on this path is only due to our own lack of faith in His presence and faith that He controls everything. Gurbani tells us that seeing God as away from us is one of the most serious errors. As soon as we have faith in all His attributes as described in Gurbani, we are able to realize the truth. This is why in Sukhmani Sahib, Guru Ji says that truth is revealed immediately in the heart of the one who has faith in the presence of God. Thus, the faith

that God is everywhere and that, everything is under His command and ruled by His love, seem to be the salient features of Naam.

Talking or writing about this faith is quite different from actually having it. Until we have it, we need to meditate upon the demeanor of someone who has this perfect faith all the time. We should not rest until we meet such a person in flesh. Without this desire, all activities, religions, covenants, etc. are farce, a blasphemy against God. Without love of God and without having a complete faith in His presence, all other disciplines become useless. This is why the Tenth Master writes, "Why sit with the eyes closed, to meditate, like a crane, or make pilgrimages, when you continue to be lost in the objects of the world? Let everyone listen to this truth, only those who love God will ever see Him. Without it, no one can understand God's secrets. The entire world, with all its religions, is simply tangled in futile rituals." Why not continue to cry in prayer until God grants this love in our heart.

Guru Ji often refers to Naam as the "true" Naam. This means that there must be false Naam also. How can we isolate true Naam from false Naam? The help of Gurbani is critical here, because true Naam is unlike everything we know so far. It cannot be described. True Naam is obtained from the Guru. Only the verses of Gurbani describe it, in spirit. Thus, Gurbani guides us in the right direction.

We need persistent self-analysis here, because a desire for anything besides God Himself cannot be true Naam. This is also known as Bhakti (no relationship with some "Bhakti Movement" coined by the scholars). Bhakti has been here since the beginning of creation. Bhakti is the litmus test of true Naam. This is why Guru Nanak chose to call it Satnam, that only truth, only God Himself is

His true Naam. All other names are man made and thus, they are simply, names.

One may ask, then, how can someone repeat Naam before having realized the truth of God? The meaning of the word 'Naam' and 'Repetition of Naam' is also idiomatic, indicating a life that is imbued with love of God. For example, when we are in love, we are said to have only that person's name on our lips and in our heart. Most of the time, as soon as we wake up, we are busy repeating our own name or the name of something that we are obsessed with.

Thus, repeating Naam stands for

- a) aspiring for God,
- b) to cherish and adore Him,
- c) to see Him as the doer of everything,
- d) to see Him as the creator of everything,
- e) to see Him as the giver of all the bounties,
- f) to be reminded of God with each activity,
- g) to be reminded of Him in all pain or pleasure,
- h) to call upon Him for all our needs,
- i) to be unable to forget God,
- j) to be in love with God, and so on.

Jap Sahib is also a form of Naam. Reciting the entire Jap Sahib (also known as the Japji) in a meditative manner opens the door to an understanding of Naam and its secrets. Guru Nanak has outlined some basic steps to Naam, in Jap Sahib:

1. We must accept whatever Waheguru does as, His will, without questioning it. If we question God's acts, then we cannot have Naam.

2. We must sing His praise, with gratitude. This is accomplished through singing Gurbani. Guru Nanak notes some components of praise here: thanking God for everything, seeking virtues and a conduct that agrees with the truth, obtaining education and critical thinking, marveling at death and rebirth and how God seems to be far away but He always sees us here and now. The list can go on and on.

3. We must meditate and ponder upon the above during the Amrit Vela (the last portion of the night) and we should try to see God in everything, especially during the Amrit Vela.

4. Guru's grace is essential before we can receive Naam. Nothing can be achieved before we have a perfect faith in the Guru and we submit to the Guru. Then, Guru inspires us to never forget Waheguru. Submission to Guru starts with taking Amrit.

5. We must learn to listen to Guru's teaching with our spiritual ears. There are ways to sharpen this skill. This opens the doors to all spiritual knowledge. After hearing Guru's teaching inside our heart, we can get Naam, but only when we obey Guru's guidance completely.

When we work on obtaining God's love by, listening and obeying to the Guru, we start getting cleansed of all the filth that was collected over numerous lifetimes. Then, a state of inner peace and contentment takes over. It continues to grow every day. We must remember that receiving Naam is not a singular event, but a perpetual act of God's Grace, and continued advancement of illumination in our heart, lasting a lifetime.

Gurbani says that Naam has no beginning and no end. Therefore it would be correct to say that, in a way, any activity

that takes us towards Naam is a component of Naam. The simple act of asking these questions is a part of Naam also. Sri Naranjan Singh Ji used to say that even a resolve to rise at Amrit Vela to bathe and meditate upon Naam, is also Naam. Thus, various states of individual progress are all part of the same Naam. Realizing evanescence of life and the reality of death, agonizing over separation from Guru and God, experiencing Guru's love in Gurbani, feeling it in the nature, in the flowers, seeing God as the real doer, hidden behind everything and in everyone, being compassionate towards everyone, is all Naam. Shunning anything that would take us away from Naam, is also Naam.

True Naam can be obtained only from the Guru. It is realized in the company of someone who has realized it already. Such a person can never forget it and cannot live without it. Naam cannot be given or taken at will or at some scheduled moment. Some people think that Naam is obtained from the Panj Piyare at the time of Amrit Sanchar. This is a serious mistake. Naam is given and received only when God sees it fit. Guru is a perfect being who acts only under God's will. Naam is a perfect act. It is an act of perfect mercy, performed by the perfect being, at a perfectly appropriate moment, only when the seeker is perfectly ready, no sooner and no later. There is no human decision involved here, only love, and nothing else.

Simran

The only way to receive Naam everyday is to cherish and remember Naam with each breath until, one day we will merge into it. This cherishing and loving remembrance, a longing, is called Simran. Cherishing God (Naam) during all our activities brings us closer to the inner state and conditions that would be suitable for realization of Naam. As Guru Ji says in Sukhmani

Sahib, Simran of God removes mental dross so that Naam can enter into our heart. Cherishing or remembering Naam is called Naam Simran.

We could say that Naam Simran is like stepping into the sea of Naam. But Naam Simran should not be confused with the Naam itself. Even though the path and the destination merge into each other, it is important to keep them separate for the purpose of this discussion.

During each era, Naam takes a human form to come and show us the correct way. Or, should we say that the humans after merging into Naam, linger here or come back just for our sake. Guru Nanak established another unique basis of Naam. Words uttered by those who have merged into Naam, called Bani, God's message or Shabad in the form of a language, are also Naam.

Shabad has been here from the beginning. Guru Ji often refers to it as the "true" Shabad, which means that there are some writings that may appear to be God's Word or Shabad, but are not, and we need to be careful. We should not criticize any scripture. All we need to know is that Guru Ji has compiled all the true Shabads they could find, into one volume. This volume is perfect, and a Sikh needs look no further. We treat no other writing as the true Shabad. Doing so would be a betrayal of the Guru. This is also known as being a Manmukh, like a dog with no master, who wanders from house to house.

Gurbani is Naam. Gurbani is Waheguru Himself. Experiencing Shabad in the spirit is also called hearing of the true Shabad. Music helps put our ego in check. Singing Gurbani helps the true Shabad to rub off into our heart. Mere recitation of the Bani has little value here. Plain singing has no magical powers of

its own. It has to come from the heart, with the mind being focused on the Shabad. Joining other Sikhs who gather for the same spiritual purpose acts as a catalyst to soak our heart with Gurbani. This is called Sat Sangat. Gurbani Kirtan and Sat Sangat are thus, essential components of Naam Simran.

A sincere effort with humility, to sing Bani melodiously and accurately, assists all the other listeners who are spiritually gathered there to attain union with Gurbani. This is rewarded with Guru's blessing, even though such a person was engrossed in the singing only.

Most often, the reward from joining the Sangat is realized at a later moment, the next morning or the next week, because it can come only when the ego is displaced, only when we least expect it. If we want to shorten this delay, it would be helpful not to expect anything when we are in the Sangat. Just keep our attention focused on Gurbani, regardless, and accept whatever Guru gives, or does not give, with gratitude. Then we can share it with others also.

Finally, following Guru's command is also Naam Simran. Uncut hair comes naturally to those who are attached to the Sikh Gurus. Those Sikhs, who keep uncut hair and thus, carry the seal of the Guru in public, are also engaged in Naam Simran in a way. Its net result, though, would depend upon the sum total of all their other actions. In order to turn us into warriors who will never relent to oppression, Guru Gobind Singh Ji added a weapon, and removed the ambiguity of wearing (or not wearing) a sheet and gave us breeches. This completed the evolution of a perfect order of humans. An order devoted to Naam, that cannot be destroyed or assimilated, as in the past.

Gurmantra

Just as an animal tethered to a post can run in all directions but it cannot get away from the post. In the same way, recurrent prayer, remembrance of God, Naam Simran, is facilitated when the mind is reminded over and over by its being tethered to a word or a Mantra. Any uplifting word can be used as a mantra. When a Mantra obtained from a spiritual bond with the Guru, then a special benefit of Guru's presence accompanies the Mantra, or Gurmantra. When the Sikh repeats the Gurmantra, the Guru stays with the Sikh and guides him everywhere, always appearing very near to the Sikh. A Sikh remembers this and enjoys Guru's presence.

Someone may ask, can God not do this Himself? Gurbani describes it both ways because there is no difference between God and the Guru. The difference lies only in our own perception. Initially, it is easier to relate to the Guru that we know. Guru widens our perception of truth and shows us God everywhere. After having a spiritual bond, that comes only through complete submission to the Guru, the Guru always stays with us, everywhere, and, feeds us with Naam at every opportunity. A true Guru discourages any attachment to Guru as a person and always pushes the Sikh to connect with the all-pervading God. Thus, repetition of Gurmantra, training the body to repeat a word all the time, is a form Naam Simran.

In the Sikh Panth the Gurmantra, and not Naam, is obtained from the Panj Piyare. This part of Sikh discipline is prescribed at the time of Amrit. It is not recorded in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The word 'Waheguru' is the supreme Gurmantra because its meaning does not limit the expression of Naam. Gurbani often tells us as beginners to utter the Gurmantra with mouth (tongue). It always

helps to utter the Gurmantra out loud, however, we must remember that audible repetition of Gurmantra is a rudimentary state.

We should be careful that repetition of Gurmantra does not turn into a mere physical activity or a ritual. Mere repetition of Gurmantra has no magical powers of its own. A parrot-like chanting of Gurmantra has no value. Without cherishing it in the heart, a word itself becomes meaningless. Gurbani teaches us over and over that Naam Simran is a state of thought and feeling. It tells us to do Naam Simran with each breath. As soon as possible, Gurmantra should be associated with breath so that it can be repeated quietly at all times, with breath. In time, this becomes a second nature.

Strange practices, like panting, an effort to produce audible sound of Waheguru with breath, etc. can cause alkalosis from hyperventilation and produce unpredictable neuro-psychiatric experiences. Also, repeating "Waheguru, Waheguru" in quick succession, like an engine, out loud, often in a single breath, accompanied by drums and other musical instruments etc., and becoming lost in such acts, can produce a state of swoon, just like a beat or rhythmic dancing can. However, none of these comprise Naam Simran.

Rather, Guru Ji has condemned such practices in the Asa Di Vaar, "Dancing and jumping (including shouting and panting) titillate the mind, but only those who have His fear can truly have His love." At another place Guru Ji has said, "Churn the milk of Naam slowly so that you will not lose the Divine butter" and "My dear Saint friends, praise God with an alert and one-pointed mind." Thus, a session of Kirtan that is pockmarked with frequent and

frenzied repetition of "Naam" is at best, extremely distracting to everyone else.

Gurbani itself is the greatest Mantra. Unless one is overpowered by emotions, there is no need to interrupt a Shabad with a ritualistic chanting of Waheguru. Had Guru Ji intended us to do so, they would have written Gurbani indicating the slots where Gurmantra could be chanted within each Shabad.

We need to avoid such self-directed practices. A true state of Naam Simran is a state of love, where Gurmantra is being quietly repeated with each breath. This continues during the Kirtan, eating, talking, or sleeping, without making it a show. Correct Naam Simran causes subjugation of our ego with Gurbani and it strengthens compassion towards others. If not, then we must have made a mistake.

A person with true Simran, practiced over several years, exudes the sound of Waheguru from his or her body and through each strand of hair. This sound is not like snoring that mimics the sound of Waheguru, often misunderstood as the sound of Naam, but a whisper that emanates from the body.

Finally, no discussion on Naam Simran would be complete without discussing some ways to achieve mental concentration, or a one-pointed mind. Mental discipline is an essential component of Simran. Here is a simple exercise that every beginner can practice: Spend a few minutes in a quiet spot with eyes closed, mentally repeating "Wah" with inhalation and "Guru" with expiration. Listen to the sound of this word in your mind. Soon you will start hearing the noise of other thoughts. Do not let this noise drown the sound of Waheguru. Repeat this exercise whenever you get a chance during the day.

Please forgive any mistakes.

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